




MEMORANDUM  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

DATE: February 10, 2006

TO: George M. Burgess  
County Manager

FROM:   
Carlos Alvarez, Mayor  
Miami-Dade County

SUBJECT: Workforce Housing

The need for affordable housing is evident in Miami-Dade County. With homes in Miami-Dade now priced at more than eight times the median household income – one of the highest disparities in Florida – the necessity for a comprehensive approach to address this matter can no longer be delayed. Housing costs are increasingly exceeding the financial reach of many low-to-moderate wage workers. In Miami-Dade County, our home prices rose 21% in 2005 while incomes stagnated. Currently, the County's median income for a single family is \$46,350, and the median price of a single family house is \$369,000. This makes it almost impossible for anyone to achieve the American Dream of becoming a homeowner.

These are startling statistics for the residents of our community, especially those seeking to move out of rental housing or those seeking housing nearer to their place of employment. Workforce housing, encompassing many of the occupations considered the building blocks of communities (such as teachers, day care workers, and service industry workers) and generally anyone making 60% to 120% of the area median income, is becoming increasingly difficult to locate in Miami-Dade County. This should not be the case; our "workforce" deserves more.

Therefore, I am charging you with the following task: Identify County-owned land (1 acre or more) in every Commission District that can potentially be used for developing affordable housing. This needs to be conducted in an expedited manner due to the gravity of the situation. A significant amount of discussion on this issue has occurred, and we can no longer delay taking appropriate action.

As you noted in your October 21, 2005 memorandum on this subject, there are several ways to acquire this land, including the possibility of creating a community land trust, so that the County can assemble a portfolio of properties dedicated for affordable housing. According to a draft report by County staff, there exists several large parcels of County-owned land that remain undeveloped. For instance, as you are aware, the Landmark property has approximately 80 acres of undeveloped land that can be used for elderly and workforce housing. The County also has over 650 acres in the Homestead Airforce Reserve Base, as well as land adjacent to the Civic Center, that could be used to provide housing relief.

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We need to aggressively pursue the necessary steps to clear all obstacles and build more housing for our community. Thus, a thorough analysis of the obstacles (zoning, environmental, costs, etc.) associated with each property must be done in advance to determine the suitability for use as affordable housing. For example, I know that one of the major impediments of certain properties is the need to change the zoning classification to permit residential development.

Addressing the need for affordable housing also requires an appropriate level of committed funding. Fortunately, through the Building Better Communities General Obligation Bond Program, there is \$137.7 million dollars allocated to preserving and creating affordable housing. We need to explore the possibility of leveraging more funds, such as HOME and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars, as well as public/private partnerships, that can be used to lessen the costs associated with promoting affordable housing.

We can only achieve measured success by incorporating a variety of mechanisms to mitigate soaring homeownership costs and to best utilize the County's housing inventory. In particular, I want to applaud Commissioner Barbara Jordan for championing an inclusionary zoning policy for the County. We should also continue exploring ways to make affordable housing more attainable for buyers and more attractive for sellers through low-cost financing from the Housing Finance Authority and other public agencies.

I expect that the list of available County land and an action plan for developing this land for affordable housing be completed within 60 days (April 14, 2006). The report should detail, among other things, the size and zoning of the parcels, funding sources, and a projected timeline for development. In addition, similar to the formation of the Development Process Advisory Committee (DPAC) to improve the building permitting process, I am requesting that you form a steering group – composed of representatives from the public and private sector – specifically to formulate alternatives for increasing the availability of workforce housing. I am confident that, in conjunction with elected officials and County staff, this will be a productive starting point to alleviating the housing crisis our community is facing and will continue to be challenged with in the future.

c: Honorable Chairperson Joe A. Martinez and Members,  
Board of County Commissioners  
Honorable Harvey Ruvin, Clerk of Courts  
Murray A. Greenberg, County Attorney  
Kay Sullivan, Director, Clerk of the Board  
Tony Crapp, Assistant County Manager